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The Stuart Peace

‘to vanquish... all the answerers of the worlde’

Until Charles I found himself fighting a civil war, the Stuart kings showed little enthusiasm or aptitude for the martial virtues. James I made peace with Spain, and in his monarchical self-presentation adopted the Erasmian model of *rex pacificus*. Charles I began his reign with naval campaigns against Spain and France, after which inauspicious ventures England played little part in the military affairs of Europe. Both James and Charles, and their adherents, nevertheless cultivated the triumph, translating its martial discourse into terms compatible with their policies. For their part, Protestant militants continued, as under Elizabeth, to assert their alternative policies and to criticize royal inactivity by recuperating the triumph. The first decade of James’s reign abounds in complimentary triumphs of peace, magnificence, and wisdom; only a few writers used the triumph to urge the King to combat the papist enemy. Admonition became sharper with the tensions of the 1610s. In 1612 England joined the Protestant Union, and in 1613 James’s daughter married the Protestant Elector Palatine, developments that James sought to balance by a renewed opening to Spain. Protestant enthusiasts, however, saw England again taking its place in an alliance against the Hapsburg foe. They expressed their hopes and their urgings through literary triumphs for James’s heirs and for the heroes of the continental wars. The advent of the Thirty Years War and the accession of Charles procured a more widespread revival of the martial tropes of triumph, such as the Protestant overthrow of Rome, the recovery of Jerusalem, and the prospect of empire. The years of Charles’s personal government saw a stream of ‘triumphalist’ court masques. These masques generally translate the grounds for
triumph into the royal status, ethical virtues and marital love of the king and queen. Some of them draw more directly on Roman martial values, giving their courtly refinement a basis in military might.

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The accession of James I in 1603 and his entry into London in 1604 initiated his cult as a pacific triumphator. In lauding the new prince as a peacemaker, ceremonies and writings alluded not only to the messianic ‘Prince of Peace’ but also to Augustus and his motto pax et princeps. The great triumph that inaugurated Augustus’s epoch of peace had however claimed a signal and quasi-apocalyptic victory in war, which made peace possible by establishing the dominance of west over east, masculine reason over feminine passion. In its conceits of an altogether peaceful conquest, James’s London entry claimed to outdo any military victory, by conquering without battle. Samuel Rowlands’s Aue Caesar locates James by its salutation in a Roman succession and by its review of history in a British. Rowlands rehearses the triumphs of James’s predecessors – for the conquests of Henry II in Ireland, of Richard I in the Holy Land, of Henry V in France. James equals their examples by extending his dominions, but surpasses them by doing so peacefully:

Their welcomes were from warres they had in hand,
Which losse of blood, and valour caus’d to cease:
Thy welcomes are from out a quiet Land,
Inlarging us a wondrous league of peace.4

James has fulfilled the ius triumphandi by extending the boundaries of his kingdoms, joining England and Scotland into a new empire that revives Roman Britannia. This ‘league’ between the two nations is wonderful to readers of 1603 because so different from the fears of discord that had accompanied the death of Elizabeth. It differs too from the hated League founded by the house of Guise to prevent Henri IV from achieving the peaceful accession in France that James has achieved in Britain. In Henry Petowe’s Englands Caesar Elizabeth looks down from heaven on the coronation of the new Caesar and commands her subjects to transfer their love to him:

Bid heavens Eliza from that continent,
Where she sits crownd in blisse: bid her looke downe